

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority – Emergency Cover Review

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority Emergency Cover Review consultation. Senior Officers and Elected Members have reviewed the consultation document and considered the proposed options. These were formally considered and endorsed by the **xx on xx**.

As a local authority in North Wales and as a category 1 responder, the Council plays a crucial role in civil resilience and must ensure adequate preparedness for emergencies. We work alongside the emergency services and other category 1 responders and fully appreciate and understand the importance of the service and the challenges faced. We value our continued commitments and endeavours to collaborate effectively, whilst recognizing that the current financial challenges are both uncertain and demanding. We also recognise the difficulties in planning for, delivering, and maintaining core statutory services in a period of financial constraints.

The Isle of Anglesey County Council is one of the 6 constituent authorities of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority. Membership of the Fire and Rescue Authority includes county councillors from the six local authorities and this Council has 3 members on the Authority.

The majority of funding for the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service is received by way of levy from the Unitary Authorities within the area. The Council pays into this combined fund and the contribution is based on population. Any change in the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service budget would consequently impact on the levy contributions and would result in added pressure to the Council's budget.

Please see below detailed comments:

General comments

1. The purpose and objective of the consultation is clearly set out in the document. The information within and the general presentation of the document is clear and easy to understand.
2. The document does not give detail on the reason / need for change. Is the reason due to financial difficulties and if so what is the cost of the 'do nothing' option?
3. Some critically important detail is however lacking regarding the specific impact the various options would have on the community on Anglesey (as detailed below). This is of critical importance to enable informed decision making on any future changes by the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.
4. There are differing needs and challenges across the region, primarily driven by geography, and a having a dispersed rural community. We are eager to ensure that rural communities are not at a disadvantage in terms of service provision as a result of any changes.
5. We recognise that North Wales as a region has continued to evolve and so have the risks faced by the public who live, work and visit. We also welcome the evolvement of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority to become a preventative service along with special service calls emerging as a result of climate change and advances in technology.
6. More specific information on the preventative work carried out, the impact, resource and capacity requirements would have been welcomed within the document.
7. We agree with the criteria used in developing the options and the key themes arising from the initial engagement. They are appropriate and suitable.

Options

8. The document suggests that on a regional basis, the impact of the 3 different options varies.
9. Specifically for Anglesey, the maps on pages 30-31 suggest that there will be no impact or effect from maintaining the current arrangements or changing to any of the 3 options. Is this correct?
10. Options 1 and 2 detail no specific changes or impact on the Island but would cost more. To maintain the existing level of service, if financially achievable, would be a desirable outcome.
11. The option of maintaining / remaining with current arrangements has not been included. Is the change due to financial problems and therefore what is the additional cost of the "do nothing" option to compare with (the additional costs that are set out on page 37) or is the change to improve the way the Fire Service responds to the calls and therefore the costs are additional to the current cost. Clarity is required.
12. The maps showing the location of the emergency calls clearly show that the majority of calls around the coast are in the North and on Anglesey. However, the 3 options proposed increase the full-time staff in South Meirionnydd and Denbigh. As a result, the Service will have more full-time staff in the areas with fewer calls.
13. In addition, the maps show a number of calls but no detail regarding response times, e.g. what was the current time to respond in the Beaumaris area under current arrangements in order to compare to how long it takes under the 3 options. It is difficult to interpret the impact of the change due to a lack of information in the consultation documentation.

Option 3

14. Option 3 includes the closure of one of the Island's Retained Stations in Beaumaris. The document suggests that the closure and reduction in firefighters would have no impact on the operational response time in the area and the surrounding rural areas. As one of only 6 retained stations on the Island, this is questionable. Can more detail be provided on how the impact of a potential closure would be mitigated, and the existing level of service maintained? Without this clarity/ certainty, the County Council cannot support or endorse the proposed change.
15. Our view is that the closure or non-availability of a resource would result in taking longer for the next nearest resource to attend an emergency. The next nearest response would not necessarily be coming from neighbouring stations as they may not be available due to crewing deficiencies or being required elsewhere. This therefore enhances risk to life, and we do not believe that the consultation document adequately addresses this.
16. Option 3 is the only option detailing a reduction (2,087) in the number of households that would receive a response within 20 minutes. Both options 1 and 2 note an increase (2,148 and 321 respectively). We assume that all data includes the Island and specifically Beaumaris, however this is not specified. We would appreciate further clarity, and confirmation.
17. There is a lack of specific detail in the narrative regarding the impacts of closing Beaumaris. Neither the justification or benefits of the potential closure are detailed. As previously noted, the next nearest response would not necessarily be coming from neighbouring stations, therefore suggesting the response may come from off Anglesey. With the nearest day crewed station to Beaumaris being over the Menai in Bangor, Gwynedd, it is in our view a reduced service which enhances threat to life.
18. The congestion and lack of resilience for the Menai crossings is of significant concern and dependency on the Bangor Fire Station therefore raises serious concerns. Detailed evidence

of these concerns were presented and endorsed by the Council's Executive on the 18th of July 2023 ([Improving the Reliability and Resilience across the Menai Straits.pdf \(anglesey.gov.uk\)](#)).

- a. The Britannia Bridge is the only point on the UK trunk road network hosting the Trans-European Road Network route E22, where the carriageway narrows from 4 lanes to two - one in each direction.
 - b. Restrictions on the type of vehicles that can access the Menai Suspension bridge (only up to 7.5 tonnes), and speed restrictions of 30mph along with the lack of enhanced safety facilities, such as hard shoulders contribute to poor resilience with regards to emergency vehicles.
 - c. The Britannia Bridge is vulnerable to closures due to wind, incidents and accidents.
 - d. During particularly high winds (gusts above 70mph) the bridge is fully closed – with no possible diversion route for vehicles over 7.5 tonnes.
19. The lack of resilience of the existing Menai crossings has consequential effects on the emergency services and the safety of our communities. We therefore oppose the closure of the Beaumaris Fire Station as included in option 3.

Central costs and operating structure

20. The consultation does not discuss, consider or propose any change to the central costs of running the service. The 3 options presented raise the costs between 8.1% and 13.5%. It will then be a question for the Fire Service how to fund the increase in costs, i.e. will all the costs be funded by the levy or will the service offer savings including reducing the central costs.
21. The focus must be on protecting front line services and the omission of any detail or consideration surrounding the central costs does not provide any assurance that this is the case.

In summary, I confirm the Council's position that the focus of the review must be on protecting front line services during the current economic climate and that consideration needs to be given to implementing efficiency savings in other areas within the operating structure and working practices of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority, i.e. central costs, training costs etc. Further detail, consideration and discussions are required regarding the wider operating structure and opportunities for efficiencies. The Isle of Anglesey County Council is against the closure of Beaumaris Station as stated in Option 3.

As stated previously, we value our continued commitments and endeavours to collaboration, whilst also recognising that the current financial challenges are both uncertain and demanding. We would welcome further discussion regarding our response.